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# Book Review: Vocational Education and Training in Times of Economic Crisis

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## Book Review

*Vocational Education and Training in Times of Economic Crisis: Lessons from Around the World*, edited by Matthias Pilz, Springer, Cham/Switzerland, 2017, 514 pp., ISBN 978-3-319-47854-8 (hardback), about 150 €, ISBN 978-3-319-47856-2 (electronic), about 120 €.

The book was published in the series *Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Issues, Concerns and Prospects*. Series Editor-in-Chief is Rupert MacLean. Editor of the volume is Matthias Pilz, professor and holder of the chair of Economic and Business Education and director of the German Research Center for Comparative Vocational Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T) at the University of Cologne in Germany.

## Purpose

The comprehensive volume with 26 articles and 43 contributors is structured in four parts: International Comparative Studies (Part I, 11 chapters), Asia - Including India and Excluding China (Part II, 4 chapters), China (Part III, 4 chapters), United States of America (Part IV, 2 chapters), Europe (Part V, 5 chapters), Theoretical/Conceptual (Part VI, 4 chapters). As the sub-title indicates, lessons around the world with different vocational education and training (VET) cultures, systems, policies and practices are incorporated in one volume. The diversity in VET becomes visible, accessible and comparable on two levels: within the articles with specific comparable approaches and across the articles with the composition and selection of the presented articles in one

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volume. This diversity of perspectives is one central strength of the volume. Another central strength is the common factor underlying and joining the different chapters: the focus on the relation between VET and economic crisis with a massive impact on (youth) unemployment, state funding, the role of the companies, reactions of younger and older people and labour migration. Some articles directly address VET in times of economic crisis, others discuss challenges and developments in a more general way, and all articles are carving out the dynamic configuration and development of VET embedded in traditions and culture, present needs and future challenges. The book is starting with a foreword by **Shyamal Majumdar**, a preface by **Matthias Pilz** and a series editors introduction by **Rupert MacLean**.

## Content

The first part, *International Comparative Studies*, is introduced by **Madhu Singh**. Madhu Singh deals with alternative transitions to further learning for young people from less qualified backgrounds in conjunction with pathways established and maintained through National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). Evidence is taken from 33 case studies compiled by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) for the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, which are used to highlight whether and how NQFs are actually supporting alternative routes for youth in crisis. Following, **Antje Barabasch** outlines the challenges of career management without structural support in the context of lifelong learning. Taking the examples of Denmark, France, Italy and Spain, three individuals who followed a vocational calling with different success rates are portrayed and analysed. The findings of the study provide knowledge about the policy's interest in how different types of learning interact across the lifetime course and how they may facilitate mobility in the labour market. In their literature review, **Oscar Valiente** and **Rosario Scandurra** systematise international evidence on some of the challenges and dilemmas that governments in OECD countries face when they want to implement large-scale dual apprenticeship programmes. To make dual apprenticeships attractive to both employers and students is identified as the government's primary challenge. **Valentina Barucci**, **Lea Zanola** and **Michael Axmann** focus on the labour market outcomes of young people who have completed secondary or post-secondary VET in seven middle-income countries: Jamaica, Jordan, Peru, Tunisia, Ukraine, Viet Nam and Zambia. **Náder Alyani** and **David Guile** geographically concentrate on Tehran, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Their aim is to explore the learning and upskilling required for innovating in the nascent creative sub-sectors and analyse the in-situ learning episodes within a conceptual model. **Marthe Geiben** and **Philipp Grollmann** analyse the induction process of job entrants in two sectors, car mechatronic/car mechanics and nursing occupations, that show great similarity in the tasks to be fulfilled across countries. The comparative study was conducted in Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and the Republic of Korea. **Lorenz Lassnigg** undertakes a comparative analysis of Austria, Germany and Switzerland in order to de-

termine how the three countries have retained their low levels of youth unemployment through the economic crisis.

The second part, *Asia - Including India and Excluding China*, begins with **S. Nayana Tara** and **N. S. Sanath Kumar** and their contribution to initiatives in skill upgrading in industrial training institutes in Karnataka, India. Their field study provides insight regarding the success of new initiatives including modernization of centers of excellence with the aim of contributing to India's transition to a knowledge-based economy that requires a new generation of educated and skilled people. **Thomas Schröder** provides an overview of the development of RAVTE, an autonomous and independent civil society organization. His contribution is to be regarded as a blueprint for development based on participatory action research and underlying theories. In their case study, **Nonthalee Prontadavit** and **Sirilak Hanvatananukul** investigate the policies pertaining to transferable skills in VET and curriculum for VET in Thailand. The findings are discussed with possible recommendations to take required measures at government, institutional and instructor levels. With regard to the government's attempt to improve the quality of TVET in Bangladesh, **Faruque A. Haolader**, **Khan M. Foyso** and **Che Kum Clement** provide comprehensive insight into the current situation of Bangladesh's TVET system. Their chapter covers issues such as curricula development, teacher qualification, and current initiatives to enhance the relevance of TVET and promote enrolment and female participation.

The third part, *China*, begins with a chapter by **Zhiqun Zhao**, **Zhixin Zhang** and **Felix Rauner**. Their study attempts to test and verify the usefulness of the KOMET competence assessment concept, introduced in China in 2008, for VET teachers. Levels and features of the professional competence of VET teachers are determined and the main factors affecting the development of their professional competence are analysed, which provides valuable references for policy making and discussion. **Jun Li** attains deeper insight into the vocational identity and professional development of vocational school teachers in China. His paper endeavours to offer a basic overview of what Chinese vocational teachers think of their profession and what factors may influence their professional development. The studies' results offer a basic picture of VET teachers' reasons for their choice of profession, their selection process and critical self-reflexions. **Ni Tang** and **Weiping Shi** provide a comprehensive overview of current challenges in China's employment crisis. This chapter outlines the VET policies that were implemented by the Chinese government in order to improve high (youth) unemployment rates, mismatches and shortages of skilled labour that are attributable to the structural crisis of the Chinese labour market. **Zhen He**, **Liangcai Xie** and **Yuzhu Li** investigate the current state of school-enterprise cooperation in China through a quantitative and qualitative approach involving higher vocational colleges and enterprises. Institutional complementary theory functions as analytical framework for this study.

The fourth part, *United States of America*, is introduced by a chapter from **Robert I. Lerman** that deals with firms' workforce strategies. He focuses on their apprenticeships, examining the factors that influence firm choices about providing one type of general training-apprenticeships. **Christopher Zirkle** provides a comprehensive overview of the United States VET system and provides insight into secondary vocational education

and its historical development including curriculum changes. He also outlines pathways, discusses funding and points to actual, as well as future, challenges for the United States' VET system.

The fifth part, *Europe*, consists of five chapters. In the first contribution, **Philipp Gonon** emphasises Switzerland's way to a highly regarded apprenticeship system. He discusses debates on and ways of dealing with quality doubts and shows demands and values that could be integrated into Switzerland's VET system. Addressing mismatch in Spain, **Aurora López Fogués** acknowledges the need to assess the relationship amongst education, skills and labour market demand. A human-centred approach is used in order to explore the reasons for mismatches and the consequences to the individual. In the following chapter, **Tim Grebe** and **Stefan Ekert** summarize the primary findings of the external evaluation of the pilot programme JOBSTARTER CONNECT in Germany. The focus of the project is on training modules that have been implemented in selected regions in order to increase the quality of qualification measures in prevocational training. The chapter from **Franz Kaiser**, **Silvia Annen** and **Michael Tiemann** is based on the findings of a research project at the German Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training (BiBB). The project aims at examining the similarities and differences between occupations in the sectors of service and production. In her contribution, **Sabrina Berg** deals with meritocracy in the German education system. She presents results on the impact of family backgrounds and the perceptions of teachers towards the family backgrounds of pupils; the implications for teachers and teacher training are also discussed.

The sixth and last part, *Theoretical/Conceptual*, begins with a paper from **Jim Hordern** that focuses on the constitution of vocational knowledge and the development of an analytical framework. The discussion is bolstered with examples of regions and recontextualisation processes taken from recent studies of higher apprenticeships in England. **Stefan Wolf** outlines the results of the successful transfer project, Water-Energy-Building Training and Transfer (WEB-TT), aiming at the improvement of the highest level of construction workers in an Egyptian context. Theoretical concepts underlying this project are explained and reflected upon. In her paper, **Lorna Unwin** deals with the question of whether VET research is keeping pace with change and continuity in work. This chapter offers a reflection on the way in which the interplay of change and continuity might require a more substantive and relational approach across the VET landscape. The section closes with a contribution from **Matthias Pilz** in which he presents an analytical tool that can be used to categorise individual countries in terms of the way VET is perceived and designed within the specific socio-cultural context. He focuses on the actual transfer of all or part of a VET system from one country to another. His *6P strategy* is based on the findings documented in the literature and supplemented with the author's experience of a range of transfer projects.

## Conclusion

The volume encompasses two central messages. First, there is not one best way and/or solution for VET systems in the world. Second, VET is diverse and needs diverse approaches, but this does not imply that this diversity is not accessible or disruptive. The volume enables wide and deep insights by means of country cases, field studies, pure research and policy papers, and it opens the perspective to the richness and value of diversity. Additionally, mutual learning can be stimulated from an international comparative perspective. This volume is therefore valuable for various stakeholders, researchers, practitioners and politicians regardless of their previous orientation whether it is more national or already international.

## Biographical Notes

Larissa Freund, Master of Arts in Educational Sciences, is prior to completing her Ph.D. at University of Bremen, Germany. Her research work focus on Comparative Vocational Education and Training with special emphasis on in-company learning and training in Asian countries.

Michael Gessler, Dr. phil., Dr. h.c., is a full professor of Vocational Education and Training at the Institute Technology and Education (ITB), University of Bremen, Germany. His research interests focus on innovations and transfer of innovations, teaching and learning, work-based learning, competence and organisation development and school-to-work transition.